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General Assembly

Official Records

Sixty-sixth session

95th plenary meeting
Monday, 13 February 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Agenda item 138 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/66/668/Add.1)

The President: I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/66/668/Add.1, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/66/668, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President: I would like to remind representatives that, in a letter dated 5 December 2011 addressed to all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations, I forwarded a letter dated 2 December 2011 from the President of the Human Rights Council transmitting the advanced edited version of the addendum to the report of the Council to the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, later issued as document A/66/53/Add.2.

Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 16 September 2011, the Assembly decided to consider agenda item 64, entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council", in plenary meeting and in the Third Committee on the understanding that, inter alia, the Assembly, in plenary meeting, would consider the annual report of the Human Rights Council on its activities for the year.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Assembly decides, without setting a precedent, to consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session, as contained in document A/66/53/Add.2, directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on a point of order.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006, by which the General Assembly established the Human Rights Council, defined the nature of the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly. Accordingly, the Third Committee and the Assembly undertake an annual discussion of the report of the Human Rights Council under the agenda item entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council".

In accordance with established practice, the discussion of this item is undertaken once a year, first in the Third Committee and subsequently in the General Assembly.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Please recycle

Paragraph 6 of resolution 65/281 states:

(*spoke in English*)

"Decides also to continue its practice of allocating the agenda item entitled 'Report of the Human Rights Council' to the plenary of the General Assembly and to the Third Committee, in accordance with its decision 65/503 A, with the additional understanding that the President of the Council will present the report in her or his capacity as President to the plenary of the General Assembly and the Third Committee and that the Third Committee will hold an interactive dialogue with the President of the Council at the time of her or his presentation of the report of the Council to the Third Committee."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Paragraph 7 of the same resolution states:

(*spoke in English*)

"Decides further that the annual report of the Human Rights Council shall cover the period from 1 October to 30 September, including the regular September session of the Council."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

From those two paragraphs, it is understood that the General Assembly and the Third Committee each discuss the report of the Human Rights Council only once a year. The report covers the work of the Council from 1 October to 30 September, including all resolutions adopted by the Council only in the period under review.

Accordingly, calling for this meeting to discuss the report contained in document A/66/53/Add.2 is a clear violation of resolution 65/281. The report was the outcome of the eighteenth special session of the Human Rights Council, held on 2 December 2011, which means that it took place outside the prescribed period. Therefore, legally, in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly, the report must be considered during the next session of the General Assembly, namely, the sixty-seventh, and not the sixty-sixth session.

In the letter addressed late last week by the President of the General Assembly to Member States inviting them to participate in this meeting, the President stated that he was convening this meeting "bearing in mind the latest developments in Syria" — that is what you said, Mr. President — to consider the report of the Human Rights Council issued more than two months ago. The President clearly proceeded from a political standpoint in calling for this meeting. That has nothing to do with established practice and the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

My delegation therefore objects to the convening of this meeting. It calls for its cancellation, owing to a basic breach of the procedural mechanisms for holding such a meeting and a legal violation of the procedures governing the work of the General Assembly. The correct procedure would be for the report contained in document A/66/53/Add.2 to be considered at the proper time, pursuant to resolution 65/281, that is, at the next session, namely, the sixty-seventh, and not the sixty-sixth, session of the General Assembly, in accordance with established practice.

Gathered here in the Hall of the General Assembly, the most democratically representative body, we cannot manipulate the rules of procedure for political gain. Here, I appeal to you, my brother, Mr. President, to be fair, impartial and just and not to allow history to record that, under your presidency, the rules of procedure and the mechanisms by which important meetings of the General Assembly are convened were violated. That would undermine the credibility of the General Assembly and of the United Nations as a whole.

The President: Members will recall that the Human Rights Council held its eighteenth special session on 2 December 2011. The report of the Council on its special session was subsequently issued in document A/66/53/Add.2 on 4 January.

As members are also aware, the Third Committee concluded its work for the current session on 22 November 2011. In that regard, in order to provide Member States with an opportunity to consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session, it is necessary for the Assembly to decide to consider the item directly in plenary meeting. It is my intention to proceed in that manner.

May I take it that the Assembly decides, without setting a precedent, to consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session, contained in document A/66/53/Add.2, directly in plenary meeting?

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on a point of order.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to apologize for asking for the floor on a point of order.

With all due respect for your opinion, Sir, while you preside over this meeting of the General Assembly, of which we elected you President, my delegation sees no merit in the decision that you have just taken. My delegation took the floor to discuss fundamental substantive issues concerning the rules of procedure governing the work of the General Assembly. We cannot summarize our essential objection to violations of the rules of procedure simply by citing words that undermine that objection.

Therefore, prior to any discussion, we would like to seek a legal, independent opinion that is unrelated to the presidency. We would like to seek the opinion of the Legal Counsel of the United Nations and to give delegations the opportunity to make their views known in this regard. Absent this course of action, we will be faced with challenges whose negative repercussions will be echoed in the Hall for years to come, God forbid.

The President: If the representative of Syria wishes to formally challenge, under rule 71 of the rules of procedure, the ruling that I have made, he must clearly inform the General Assembly that it is his intention to do so. A representative may appeal the ruling of the President. That appeal shall be immediately put to a vote and the President's ruling shall stand unless overruled by a majority of the members present and voting. A representative rising to a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion.

I would like to ask the representative of Syria if he is challenging the President under rule 71 of the rules of procedure.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation has risen to object to a variety of illegal procedures on the basis of which the General Assembly was called to hold this meeting today, and not only to challenge rule 71 of the rules of procedure. Accordingly, I suggested that we seek an independent legal opinion — and by that I mean independent from the presidency — so that we will not be working under the suspicion of partiality. I also requested that Member States be given the opportunity to clarify their opinion on what is happening. We did not suggest submitting anything to a vote. We are talking about the procedures and regulations governing the work of the Assembly. We would like you, Mr. President, to distance yourself from the merit or lack thereof of holding this meeting. This is the substance of our position.

The President: May I take it that the Assembly decides, without setting a precedent, to consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session, as contained in document A/66/53/Add.2, directly in plenary meeting.

I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on a point of order.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): The General Assembly is meeting pursuant to the letter we received only on Friday or Thursday evening, requesting the convening of this meeting.

Mr. President, I should say that with regard to your letter dated 9 February 2012, which was circulated to all Permanent Representatives, wherein you indicated your intention to convene this formal meeting of the General Assembly under agenda item 64, entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council", we wish that prior consultations had been held with multilateral groups, or even the General Committee, of which my delegation is a member, before the holding of this meeting was announced.

Even in extraordinary circumstances requiring an urgent formal General Assembly meeting, this should still be done through the established procedures. There is no justification for shortcutting the normal and practical process for the preparation of such a meeting. That would set a precedent and open the door for any situation to be brought before the Assembly without a specific mandate and without going through the proper channels and conducting the necessary consultations in a neutral, transparent and genuine manner, as required in the work of the Assembly.

The Permanent Representative of Syria raised a very valid point with regard to procedural matters. Your Excellency is now presiding over this very important meeting in the presence of skilful and experienced diplomats. It is therefore very important, before any action is taken, that the Permanent Representative of Syria's request for a legal opinion be taken into consideration, and that somebody from the Office of Legal Affairs explain very clearly the procedures of this matter.

The President: A representative rising on a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion.

I call on the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on a point of order.

Mr. Kim Song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): My delegation would like, at the outset, to express its deep concern at this abnormal convening of a meeting of the General Assembly. I would like also to clarify our position on the agenda item "Report of the Human Rights Council".

With reference to the agenda item on the report of the Human Rights Council, I would like to recall that according to the resolution adopted last year by the Third Committee, namely, resolution 65/281, the annual report of the Human Rights Council shall cover the period from 1 October to 30 September of the following year. That means that a meeting to consider the report of the Human Rights Council can be convened once a year — not at any time or on any date. I would therefore like to request that the resolution concerning this agenda item be respected.

In addition, the remarks made by the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic were very valuable and adhere to the rules of procedure.

The President: The representative of Syria has confirmed that he is challenging the President's ruling. Rule 71 is applicable in this case. I shall read from the relevant part of rule 71:

> "A representative may appeal against the ruling of the President. The appeal shall be immediately put to the vote, and the President's ruling shall stand unless overruled by a majority of the members present and voting. A representative rising to a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion."

I shall now put to the vote the challenge against the President's ruling.

I once again give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on a point of order.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My objection to your call for a meeting of the General Assembly today is a substantive one proceeding from the requirements set out in General Assembly resolution 65/281. What is required is to address the fundamental shortcoming represented by the convening of a meeting of the General Assembly in the light of the provisions of a resolution adopted by the Assembly itself — resolution 65/281. Therefore, Mr. President, in insisting on putting the challenge to the vote, you are going against the provisions of resolution 65/281 — a resolution that was adopted by consensus. That will make the shortcoming even more serious and result in a scandal unprecedented in the history of the Organization.

The substance of a resolution previously adopted by the General Assembly cannot be put to the vote. Getting around a procedural objection will not resolve the issue. We are not challenging your authority, Mr. President, but we are drawing your attention to the fact that there is a fundamental shortcoming that could undermine the credibility of the work of the General Assembly. It will be recorded, and anyone, from this day forward, will be able to challenge the very substance, validity and merit of resolution 65/281. These important details should be taken into account. Let us not go forward with a unilateral procedural motion.

I was not seeking a vote on procedure. I wanted the issue of the fundamental shortcoming represented by the call for this meeting to be taken up. Let us concentrate on the substance of the objection instead of avoiding it.

The President: In the light of the statement just made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to proceed to a vote on the challenge to the President's ruling.

May I take it that the Assembly decides, without setting a precedent, to consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session, as contained in document A/66/53/Add.2, directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 64 (*continued*)

Report of the Human Rights Council (A/66/53/Add.2 and A/66/53/Add.2/Corr.1)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly considered the annual report of the Human Rights Council circulated in documents A/66/53 and Add.1 at its 49th plenary meeting, on 2 November 2011.

In accordance with the decision just taken, the Assembly will now consider the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session as contained in document A/66/53/Add.2 and A/66/53/Add.2/Corr.1.

The President: We have before us the report of the Human Rights Council on its eighteenth special session of 2 December on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. I circulated that report to the Assembly in a letter dated 5 December.

The General Assembly has not yet considered the report, which contains Human Rights Council resolution S-18/1, referring to the report of the independent international commission of inquiry in the Syrian Arab Republic established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-17/1.

Already in its report of 23 November 2011 (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1), the commission of inquiry indicated that gross and systematic violations of human rights had been committed by the Syrian authorities and members of the Syrian military and security forces in different locations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Already in November, the report stated that crimes against humanity had been committed in Syria. The Syrian authorities refused to cooperate with the commission of inquiry or to give it access to Syrian territory.

The League of Arab States took strong initiatives to promote a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. It adopted an action plan on 2 November and sent an observer mission to Syria. The observer mission had to be suspended on 28 January due to the critical deterioration of the situation in Syria and the continued use of violence. On 22 January, the Arab League adopted a new plan to resolve the Syrian crisis (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 1).

The role played by the Arab League must be commended. It is in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations and the role of regional and subregional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Security Council has been unable to adopt a resolution supporting the Arab plan. I have expressed my concern about the division of the Security Council. The longer it remains divided in adopting a position on the developments in Syria, the more difficult the situation becomes, with more Syrians killed daily.

I am deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Syria. The international community should call on the Syrian authorities to end the killings immediately and to put a halt to human rights violations. All parties in Syria should stop all violence and repression, in accordance with the League of Arab States' initiative.

Several Member States have contacted me to express their concern about the situation in Syria and the need for the General Assembly to debate the issue. As President of the General Assembly, it is my responsibility to allow Members of the United Nations to express their views on the human rights situation in Syria.

In the light of all events over the past few weeks, I have asked Ms. Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, to brief us on the latest developments since the report was received in November. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Pillay: I am grateful for the invitation to address the General Assembly on the human rights situation in Syria under the agenda item entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council". The worsening human rights situation in Syria prompted the Human Rights Council to hold three special sessions and to dispatch one fact-finding mission and one independent commission of inquiry. The President of the Human Rights Council shared the report (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1) of the commission of inquiry with the Assembly on 29 November 2011.

Allow me now to update the Assembly on the current human rights situation in Syria. The violent Government crackdown on peaceful protests demanding freedom, dignity and social justice in Syria has continued unabated for 11 months now. While no exact figures can be provided due to our lack of access to the country, credible reports indicate that Syrian security forces killed well above 5,400 people last year, including civilians and military personnel who refused to shoot civilians.

Due to extreme difficulties in substantiating the events on the ground, it has become almost impossible for my Office to update the death toll in the past two months. However, we are certain that the number of dead and injured continues to rise every day. Tens of thousands, including children, have been arrested, with more than 18,000 reportedly still arbitrarily held in detention. Thousands more are reported missing. Twenty-five thousand people are estimated to have

sought refuge in neighbouring and other countries, and more than 70,000 are estimated to have been internally displaced.

While the protests have remained largely peaceful, reports of armed attacks by anti-Government fighters against Syrian forces have increased, also with consequences for civilians. According to the Government, some 2,000 military and security personnel have been killed.

I am particularly appalled by the ongoing onslaught on Homs. Since 3 February, in further escalation of its assault, the Government has used tanks, mortars, rockets and artillery to pummel the city of Homs. According to credible accounts, the Syrian army has shelled densely populated neighbourhoods of Homs, in what appears to be an indiscriminate attack on civilian areas. More than 300 people have reportedly been killed in the city since the start of the assault 10 days ago. The majority of them were victims of the shelling.

Reports indicate that hospitals, which were already struggling to cope with all those injured in recent weeks, are now overwhelmed. People have set up makeshift clinics throughout the beleaguered city. Medical supplies have been depleted. Shells have struck at least three of the makeshift clinics, resulting in casualties. Due to heavy shelling, residents have effectively been trapped in areas under attack. Electricity and communications have been cut off in some neighbourhoods and food remains scarce.

The humanitarian situation in Homs is simply deplorable. Similar accounts of intensifying assaults and a worsening humanitarian situation have been received from Zabadani, Dar'a and Al-Rastan. The risk of a humanitarian crisis throughout Syria is rising.

The failure of the Security Council to agree on firm collective action appears to have emboldened the Syrian Government to launch an all-out assault in an effort to crush dissent with overwhelming force. Yet, as the Secretary-General has said,

> "The lack of agreement in the Security Council gives no licence to the Syrian authorities to step up attacks on the Syrian population. No Government can commit such acts against its people without its legitimacy being eroded." (SG/SM/14095)

He also said that "the appalling brutality we are witnessing in Homs is a grim harbinger of worse to come".

The nature and scale of abuses committed by Syrian forces indicate that crimes against humanity are likely to have been commuted since March 2011. Independent, credible and corroborated accounts indicate that those abuses have taken place as part of a widespread and systematic attack on civilians. Furthermore, the breadth and patterns of attacks by military and security forces on civilians and the widespread destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure indicate approval or complicity of the authorities at the highest levels.

Since anti-Government protests started, security forces and Government-supported Shabbiha militias have been responsible for killing thousands of people through attacks on peaceful protests and in large-scale military operations in several cities. They have used a shoot-to-kill policy to crush peaceful protests. Several defectors from military and security forces have said that they received orders from their commanders to shoot unarmed protesters without warning. Snipers on rooftops are reported to have targeted protesters, ambulances and bystanders who were trying to rescue the wounded and collect the bodies of those killed.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence, as cities such as Homs, Hama, Dar'a and Idlib have been blockaded and curfews imposed. During the blockades, residents have not been able to obtain water, food or medical supplies. Military and security forces have targeted residential water tanks and water pipes. The blockades have often made it impossible to get the injured to hospitals.

Hospitals have been used as detention and torture facilities. Ambulances have come under fire, and many of the injured and sick have been turned away from public hospitals in several cities. Wounded detainees have been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in military hospitals. Evidence gathered indicates that doctors and medical workers have been pursued, arrested and tortured by security forces. Increasingly, most of the wounded avoid going to public hospitals for fear of being arrested or tortured. The injured are largely treated in underground hospitals established in apartments, on farms and at private homes. Hygiene and sterilization conditions are rudimentary and the mere possession of medical supplies is being punished.

Reliable information indicates that Syrian military and security forces have launched massive campaigns of arrest, arbitrarily detaining thousands of protesters,

activists and others suspected of anti-Government sentiments or activities. Some have been involuntarily and forcibly disappeared.

Credible information shows patterns of systematic and widespread use of torture in interrogation and detention facilities by security forces. According to information provided by army defectors, they received orders from their commanding officers to torture.

Extensive reports of sexual violence, in particular rape, in places of detention, primarily against men and boys, are particularly disturbing.

Children have not been spared. Children have been killed by beating, sniper fire and shelling from Government security forces in several places throughout Syria. As of the end of January, security forces had killed more than 400 children. Children, as young as 10, have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. Children have been kept in solitary confinement. They have also been kept in overcrowded cells with adults, often deprived of food and water. Schools have been used as detention facilities, sniper posts and military bases.

I am outraged by those serious violations. I am very distressed that the continued ruthless repression and deliberate stirring of sectarian tensions might soon plunge Syria into civil war. The longer the international community fails to take action, the more the civilian population will suffer from countless atrocities committed against them.

In its resolution 66/176, of 19 December 2011, the General Assembly condemned human rights violations and the use of force against children and civilians by Syrian authorities. It called on Syria to comply with its obligations under human rights law. However, the gross, widespread and systematic human rights violations have not only continued but also sharply escalated.

The Government of Syria has manifestly failed to fulfil its obligation to protect its population. Each and every member of the international community must act now to urgently protect the Syrian population.

The League of Arab States has responded resolutely to the events in Syria; its efforts should be supported. Unfortunately Syria failed to fully comply with the League's observer mission and persisted in its violent crackdown. The League should continue its effort to compel Syria to end the violence. My Office remains ready to provide appropriate assistance to the League of Arab States if the League so requests.

International and independent monitoring bodies, including my Office and the independent commission of inquiry, must also be allowed into Syria. Humanitarian actors must be guaranteed immediate and unhindered access.

The fact-finding mission, the commission of inquiry on Syria and I myself have all concluded that crimes against humanity are likely to have been committed in Syria. I have encouraged the Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. All Member States must ensure that those crimes do not go unpunished; yet those crimes continue to be committed as I speak.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the Assembly more than 60 years ago, makes clear that it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse as a last resort to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law. The people of Syria are asking for the rights that every human being is entitled to, and they are looking to the Assembly to speak with one voice to support them in that endeavor.

The President: I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my surprise that you, Sir, in whose election as President of the General Assembly we participated, have rejected seeking an independent legal opinion on whether the convening of this meeting accords with the rules of procedure governing the Assembly's work. I am also surprised that you, Mr. President, have chosen to impose your position on the Assembly despite calls from several delegations to the contrary. That runs counter to the principle of democracy, under which we all work.

This is the first time in my career as a professional diplomat over the past 33 years — having personally participated in the establishment of the Human Rights Council as Ambassador of my country in Geneva — that I have seen an important person, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, make a clear accusation, against my country, for having violated human rights, on the basis

of quoted reports, which she mentioned dozens of times during her statement, rather than on, say, conclusions stemming from visits or dialogue on the ground with the Syrian Government or cooperation with the national inquiry commission set up by the Syrian Government to investigate human rights violations. How can we henceforth trust the High Commissioner for Human Rights on matters concerning the defence and promotion of human rights as she, regrettably, chooses to take a negative, hostile and unprincipled position against the Syrian Government?

My delegation would like to state that the main reason for the continuation of the unfortunate situation in Syria is the lack of an appropriate and legitimate international climate in which the situation is considered proceeding from respect for the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the principles of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States, as well as non-interference in their internal affairs. It seems that those important terms are being heard by some for the very first time. It appears that all provisions of the United Nations Charter are no longer in force and we are now to draw up new provisions that overturn those set by the founding fathers of the United Nations some 65 years ago.

Some in Arab, regional and international circles have chosen to wage a media, political and diplomatic war against my country — I say a war, not a campaign — by adopting aggressive and illegitimate positions whose main purpose is to undermine the pillars of governance in Syria, not to reform them, by using force, threatening to use force, and imposing unilateral economic sanctions that have no international legitimacy, as well as a hysterical siege on a founding member of this international Organization, without the slightest heed to the provisions of its Charter.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights spoke of the tragic conditions under which some Syrians are living. That is indeed true. However, she failed to talk about the real reasons that gave rise to that situation. She did not mention the harsh Arab, regional and international unilateral economic sanctions against Syria, as if she had not heard about the sanctions and the embargo.

In the city of Aleppo on 10 February, in one day, 28 people were killed and another 235 were wounded because two terrorist suicide bombers targeted innocent civilians in an urban area next to a kindergarten, a food distribution centre and a security compound. On 6 January, the Syrian capital itself suffered a terrorist suicide bombing in a highly populated area with many passers-by, which led to the martyrdom of 26 citizens and the wounding of 63. Prior to those attacks, on 23 December 2011, the Syrian capital Damascus itself suffered two terrorist suicide bombings against two Government targets in an area crowded with passers-by. Those suicide bombings resulted in 50 martyrs and more than 200 injured among innocent civilians and military personnel.

We know that terrorist suicide bombings are a specialty of Al-Qaida, which is an organization that, I believe, all of us in the United Nations have agreed to condemn. The names of its leaders are inscribed on a consolidated Security Council list. I hope that none of us have forgotten that, in particular given that we know that a United States media source — McClatchy's Washington Bureau — yesterday published an important report stating that Al-Qaida was responsible for the suicide bombings in Damascus and Aleppo. I hope that the High Commissioner for Human Rights will perhaps quote that in her next briefing.

To date, Syria has suffered thousands of innocent civilian and military victims as the cost of its tireless attempt to restore security and stability to the country in exercise of its exclusive right to protect its citizens. Every sovereign State represented here has the exclusive responsibility to protect the safety of its citizens. In Syria we cannot imagine sending soldiers to defend Occupy Wall Street protesters. Neither we nor any other Government could imagine sending forces to protect demonstrators in London or Paris. The State has the exclusive responsibility of defending security on its national soil. That is known by all.

It is also known that armed groups are daily committing assassinations against academics, scientists and intellectuals in every part of Syria, just as they did in Iraq, to destroy the foundation of the State. That is the goal: to undermine the foundation of the Syrian State and push it towards chaos. There would then be humanitarian corridors because, after all, there would be no State; then buffer zones, because there is no State; then a no-fly zone, because there is no State. That is the objective, namely, to show that the Syrian State is unable to protect its own citizens on its own territory.

The huge losses in Syria among civilians and security forces are a deep wound. We are sad but we

place the responsibility for those losses at the door of those who are by force attempting to further political interests while using Syrian blood as currency. To them I would say, stop killing my people; stop your plots against Syria. Help the Syrian people; help the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and to satisfy legitimate demands from the people for reform. Help us to carefully listen to the demands of peaceful protesters. It is their right. We want their help to realize that right on the ground, without the threat or use of force and without sanctions and embargoes.

The issue of combating terrorism has come front and centre at the United Nations, in both the Security Council and the General Assembly. An attempt to build international consensus on combating terrorism was on the agenda for many years. It was crowned with the adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, in 2006. I wish to recall with pride the efforts that I made to ensure the Strategy's adoption. Through its resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011), the Security Council set up a special committee to combat the terrorism of Al-Qaida. The Security Council and Member States have devoted thousands of hours of work to coordinating international efforts in considering how to confront the threats and danger posed by that international terrorist organization.

The question that comes to mind today is: How can the United Nations combat Al-Qaida terrorism while at the same time some of its Member States are financing and providing succour — indeed, sending Al-Qaida combatants — for the carrying out of terrorist acts in Syria? In fact, some of the statements made by armed terrorist groups concerning their terrorist operations inside Syria have emanated from the territories of neighbouring Arab States themselves. Perhaps the Assembly has heard the statement of the leader of Al-Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, in which he called on Al-Qaida members from all parts of the world to go to Syria and commit terrorist acts. The Assembly may also have heard statements by the leader of Al-Qaida in Lebanon, Omar Al-Bakri — who lived in Great Britain until being deported to Lebanon in 2005 — expressing his intention to send Al-Qaida elements across the border to Syria for terrorist acts. That was reported in the media, but it did not catch the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Security Council or the vast majority of the members of this body.

Perhaps the Assembly has also heard about statements by officials in Lebanon and Iraq concerning the infiltration into Syria by Al-Qaida elements from Lebanon and Iraq. Al-Qaida has even mourned on its website five of its dead in Homs and Deir Azzor — Abu Hamza Al-Muhajir, who was apparently from the United Arab Emirates; Abu Sara Al-Muhajir, also from another Arab State, Saudi Arabia; and three others, whose corpses were discovered in Syria and whose identities have been determined — who came to commit suicide terrorist attacks. In addition, three of those whose bodies were found in Homs were Al-Qaida members from Libya.

What is truly strange is that the President of the General Assembly, who has made many official statements since his election, has not taken up the suicide attacks in Damascus and Aleppo. He has not expressed his rejection of terrorist acts committed by Al-Qaida in Syria; whereas he did hastily call for the convening of this meeting because, as he said, he wants to protect Syrian blood. Even worse, the resolution of the League of Arab States adopted yesterday in Cairo openly committed the League to providing material and political support to the Syrian opposition, even the armed opposition; whereas we all know that some in the opposition have chosen to bear arms and are undertaking terrorist acts in Syria. That necessarily means that whoever supports the resolution adopted in Cairo is now encouraging terrorism in Syria, directly counter to Security Council resolution 1624 (2005). That is incitement to terrorism, and counter to the prohibition on financing or committing terrorist acts contained in that resolution.

The States of the Gulf Cooperation Council are part of the problem, not part of the solution. Let me refer to the fact that Doha, the capital of Qatar, is now hosting meetings by external armed opposition groups that refuse national dialogue and the implementation of the reform plan and are fundamentally responsible for the shedding of Syrian blood. I call on the General Assembly and the President to shoulder their responsibilities in combating terrorism and to implement relevant resolutions in that regard. I also call on all those who host, support, fund or arm terrorist groups to cease to do so forthwith, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy. In that regard, my country reaffirms its right to protect its citizens and to combat and put an end to terrorism and armed violence.

We would have wished to see the same level of enthusiasm that the President of the General Assembly showed in calling for this official meeting demonstrated in connection with Palestine's request for membership in the United Nations. Such enthusiasm could have induced the United States to agree to that request and to have the Security Council bring pressure to bear on Israel, the occupying Power, to end its occupation of Arab lands and its settlement practices and allow for the creation of the State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967.

However, there was political hypocrisy; some were short-sighted and some co-opted by others. Of the thousands of resolutions and outcomes of the dozens of investigating committees and fact-finding missions sent by the Organization to put an end to Israel's occupation of Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan, none has been implemented. Israel and its protectors implemented half of the partition resolution (resolution 181 (II)), and conveniently forgot the other half, which deals with the establishment of a Palestinian State on Palestinian territory, not outside Palestine.

The resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council on Syria, the most recent of which is resolution S-18/1, have been based on deceptive and unilateral media reports that do not take the position of the Syrian Government into account. Their provisions are drafted in a spiteful manner unprecedented in Human Rights Council resolutions. The report adopted by the States members of the Council ignores the activities of the armed terrorist groups that are threatening the security of citizens, their property and the State. Such activities would be rejected by any sovereign State.

Entire buildings in Homs have been mined by some of those terrorist groups with bombs weighing between 40 and 50 kilos that can be remotely detonated when security forces attempt to enter the buildings. Many buildings have been blown up when security forces attempted to go inside them. Those are the pictures that people have seen on their television screens. The blowing up of mined buildings by armed groups in order to kill as many members of the security forces as possible is not a peaceful demonstration; that is violence.

Syria stressed to the High Commissioner that it had set up an independent judicial national committee of inquiry with broad powers to investigate any crimes perpetrated during the current events. The committee is working day and night to uncover the truth in order to help the victims and punish the perpetrators. I reiterate that anyone who perpetrates an aggressive act of armed violence must be brought to justice. That justice must be national justice — not YouTube justice, not justice on the screens of Al-Jazeera or Al-Arabiya, but national justice.

We have stated repeatedly that the committee has not yet completed its work. The Syrian Government does not want to prejudge the situation or provide subjective or politically motivated results, such as those of the international commission of inquiry.

Are those present here aware that, as I said earlier, the very commission cited by the High Commissioner conducted interviews and took the testimony exclusively of armed Syrian defectors and members of the opposition in a camp along the Syrian/Turkish border? Naturally, anyone in the opposition will speak out against the Government. Members of armed groups will speak out against the Government. The refugees whom we have called upon to return will testify against the Government. However, that entire group is composed of no more than 7,000 people out of 23 million Syrian citizens. The number of Syrians is greater than the entire population of the States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

It is strange that calls for reform, respect for human rights and peaceful demonstration are being directed at Syria alone and not at other States of the region. Some Member States that are so keen to defend human rights in Syria are the very ones that prevented the League of Arab States from adopting the comprehensive initiative recently put forward by Syria on the promotion of democracy, reform and human rights in all Arab States. That initiative called for the adoption of a resolution by the Council of the League of Arab States expressing a comprehensive Arab view on the promotion of democracy; reform in all Arab States; and meeting popular demand for various freedoms, human rights, multiparty systems, freedom of the press, free, fair and transparent elections, and the right to self-expression, peaceful assembly and demonstration; and the defence of the rights of minorities and of foreign workers on their land.

That initiative was aborted by the ministers of the GCC. I am speaking here of their Governments, not of our brothers and sisters in those countries. If Qatar tomorrow were a victim of aggression, we would stand

by Qatar and defend it. If tomorrow Saudi Arabia were faced with acts of aggression or attacks, we would stand shoulder to shoulder with Saudi Arabia and defend it.

A report entitled "Saudi Arabia: A Status Report of the Last Five Years" has been co-published by the Gulf Issues Centre for Strategic Studies in London and the Institute of Gulf Affairs in Washington, D.C., addressing issues that may be inappropriate to take up here. Let me just say that Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that continues to use the sword in carrying out the death penalty — a practice going back more than 1,000 years. I shall say no more.

The Syrian leadership has spared no effort since the beginning of the current crisis in the country to respond to legitimate popular demands. We have done our utmost speedily to adopt a comprehensive reform programme based on promoting the building of national democracy and the widest possible participation of Syrian citizens in economic and political life, based on multiple political parties and stressing the rule of law, entrenching national unity and ensuring security, stability and prosperity for the Syrian people. The committee set up to draft the new constitution completed its work two days ago. A draft has been referred to the President of the Republic and will be the subject of a referendum in two or three weeks.

Syria reiterates before the Assembly that comprehensive national dialogue, with the participation of all strata, factions and communities, regardless of their affiliation, is the correct and only way forward towards reform and the satisfaction of legitimate popular demands. Syria stresses that it is committed to serious, comprehensive reform, despite all foreign attempts to hamper its implementation in Syria through an unprecedented campaign of media and political incitement against my country through the provision of funds, weapons and logistical and media support to armed terrorist groups that are committing acts of sabotage, destroying private and public property, killing and attempting to undermine stability and civic peace. Will the blowing up of gas and oil pipelines and refineries, attacks on private and public institutions, the mining of buildings, or the assassination of civil pilots, university professors, intellectuals and doctors lead to reform or uproot corruption? Is that reform?

Yes, we have shortcomings; yes, we have problems in Syria. However, is there anyone in the Hall whose country does not have shortcomings or problems? Who will cast the first stone? We need the help of the international community to go forward with reform and to put Syria on the right path — one that protects its long history and high civilization.

The submission of a draft resolution by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, supported by the Gulf Cooperation Council, is an attempt to force through that which they failed to force through the Security Council by going through the back door of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, I should like to share some information. On the Google website, some street names have been changed in Google maps, particularly in the cities of Homs and Idlib. This is a flagrant violation of the resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab League pertaining to the standardization of geographic nomenclature. What does Google have to do with the names of streets in Syrian cities? What is that serious, important website doing changing the names of streets in small Syrian cities? Is it an attempt to stem the shedding of Syrian blood, or is it part of the war that I have already mentioned?

The President: In defence of the principle of freedom of speech, very wide latitude is allowed to representatives during their interventions. However, a line must be drawn in order to maintain the dignity and decorum of the Hall.

Mr. Mahmoud (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting in these critical circumstances. We would also like to thank Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her briefing, which we believe sends a critical and important message to the international community on the need to move immediately to put an end to the killing and violence in Syria.

We note the findings of the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States at its meeting in Cairo yesterday on the need to urgently address the critical and urgent humanitarian crisis inflicted on Syrian civilians in many governorates as a result of increased violence and shortages of basic food, medicine, fuel and other amenities. We stress the need to implement in full all the resolutions of the Council of the League of Arab States relevant to the Syrian situation, including resolution 7444, adopted on 22 January, which contains an action plan for the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis. We urge the Syrian Government to fulfil its commitments and respond positively and speedily to

Arab efforts to find a peaceful exit to the crisis in Syria, and stress once again in this context the primacy of a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis and the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

In implementation of resolution 7446 of the League of Arab States, the delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt, acting as the current Chair of the Group of Arab States in New York, shall, in coordination with other States Members of the United Nations, submit a draft resolution on the deteriorating situation in Syria to the General Assembly today or as soon as possible. The draft resolution stresses the points that we have already clarified, as well as all other relevant terms of reference adopted and endorsed by the League of Arab States. We look forward to the support of all Member States for the draft resolution.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this important meeting of the General Assembly, and Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her valuable briefing on the human rights situation in the fraternal Syrian Arab Republic.

For the past 11 months, the Syrian people have been subjected to all forms of intimidation, killing and torture at the hands of the Government, and in full view of the whole world. The Syrian people have suffered and been killed for more than four decades, yet their situation never came to light. Their suffering is not new. Like the Libyan people, they have suffered at the hands of an evil regime that has never given a thought to the country's development or the people's prosperity. Both regimes oppressed their people with tools they inherited and learned to use in the 1970s and 1980s from the now obsolete communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

Yes, the Al-Assad family killed thousands of Syrians in Hama in the 1980s and the Al-Qadhafi family killed thousands of Libyans in the 1980s and 1990s. The massacre that occurred at the Abu Salim prison, where hundreds of prisoners were killed in cold blood in their cells, is well known to all. The Syrian people have endured a similar situation in fraternal Syria.

The Syrian regime benefited from the crimes of the despot Muammar Al-Qadhafi and his oppression of the Libyan people during their recent uprising. But the oppression of the Libyan people has ended and I believe that the Syrian despots will meet the same destiny, because those whose hands have been stained by the blood of their own people will find no place to rest on the face of the Earth.

The Syrian regime wishes to exploit the principles of sovereignty and independence in order to enjoy impunity, and therefore invokes those principles as it subjects the Syrian people to untold suffering. That should not be. When people continue to suffer widespread violations of their human rights and attempts to annihilate them, and when tanks aim their weapons at residential buildings and shell civilians arbitrarily, then I affirm that the principles of sovereignty or non-interference in the internal affairs of States cannot be invoked.

Regrettably, some invoked those principles when they resorted to the use of the veto, thereby prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people. Their actions have provided the Al-Assad regime with a licence to continue to kill its own people. The responsibility to protect the Syrian people has now become an international responsibility. After 11 months of suffering and 11 months of the Syrian Government failing to respond to the demands of the international community, there is no excuse for silence or for prolonging the situation. The international community must take every possible measure to protect the Syrian people, who continue to shed their blood. Scores of Syrians are killed daily. We must find a way to protect the Syrian people by operationalizing the principle of the responsibility to protect.

The Assembly must discuss possible safe havens where Syrians can take refuge from oppression and save their own lives from the daily shelling by their Government. The Libyan delegation supports all of the measures envisaged by the League of Arab States, as well as the draft resolution to be introduced by the Group of Arab States. We truly hope that the international community will move quickly to protect the Syrian people.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, first of all, to confirm my delegation's support of the statement made by the representative of Egypt as Chair of the Group of Arab States. I will make my statement on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in its capacity as Chair of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and on its own behalf.

On 19 December 2011, the General Assembly adopted resolution 66/176, on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, which condemned

the repeated violations of human rights carried out by the Syrian authorities. The Assembly asserted that some of those offences and practices were such that those responsible should be brought to justice under international criminal law. Since then, the killing machine has continued in the Syrian Arab Republic, claiming over 7,000 dead and many more wounded and displaced.

Is it not now time for the long night to come to an end? How can the international community remain silent before all of the heinous crimes committed in Homs, Hama, Idlib and so many other places in Syria? How can anyone ignore those crimes? Today the Assembly heard the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights describe those horrifying and painful events in detail.

The States members of the GCC have worked with other fraternal Arab States to find a swift and peaceful solution to the political crisis in Syria. We have sought a solution that will halt the bloodshed in Syria, protect its territorial integrity and prevent any foreign intervention in the internal affairs of the country. Any solution must ensure peace, security and harmony for the citizens of the country and meet their legitimate demands for a decent and dignified life under a multiparty system that makes no distinction among the various categories, factions and sectors of society, including the various religions, and respects human rights and fundamental freedoms and dignity.

However, the Syrian authorities have not yet responded to our effort. Those members that vetoed the relevant United Nations resolution, which had enjoyed broad international support, have effectively given a green light to the Syrian authorities to kill even more people and to exert yet more repression, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted today. The Syrian people have sought justice, but their confidence and trust have been undermined. That has destroyed the legitimacy and credibility of the Syrian regime.

We call on the international community as a whole, and on the Security Council in particular, to heed the appeal of the Syrian people, put an end to the bloodshed and support a return to balance and stability from this struggle between military tanks and unarmed civilians. It must protect the rights of civilians. The State has not been able to live up to its obligations and its duty to protect its people. We need joint Arab-United Nations peacekeeping forces to monitor a ceasefire.

We have taken note with satisfaction of the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Arab Group, in which he announced the Group's plans to introduce in the Assembly a draft resolution calling for a follow-up investigation of the findings of the report presented to us today and declaring support for the efforts of the League of Arab States to find an agreed upon political solution. We call on all Member States to vote in favour of that draft resolution.

Finally, when speaking of human rights we must point out the ongoing aggressive acts by the Israeli occupying authorities against Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including blatant human rights violations, the settlements policy, the embargo, murders, deprivation and detention. Those are all human rights violations suffered by the Palestinian people, who are thwarted in their quest for self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their national soil.

Any violations of human rights in Syria, or indeed in any other country, should not lead us to forget that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territory has been ongoing for 45 years. That stark violation of human rights is a matter that we should consider carefully and urgently.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative to convene this meeting at a time when we must take up the facts on the ground in sisterly Syria, a country that is facing a severe humanitarian crisis resulting from unacceptable targeting of civilians and violence against them.

The report from the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the current situation in various cities and villages and in the Syrian countryside is a clear testament to the tragedy befalling Syria's people. It is a tragedy that runs counter to all the provisions of every resolution of the League of Arab States, as well as the Arab action plan. My delegation therefore condemns such actions. The escalation of acts of violence against civilians and the resort to the military option while ignoring international calls on the Syrian Government to bear full responsibility for the country's deteriorating humanitarian conditions and daily death toll must be stopped.

Proceeding from our commitment to the revolution against oppression and the violation of rights and freedoms in my country, we cannot fail to respond to the demands of the Syrian people. They are the same demands as those of the Tunisian people, for freedom and dignity. The facts in the report of the High Commissioner confront us squarely with our responsibilities as the international community. My delegation therefore demands that the Syrian Government abide by the terms of the action plan under the auspices of the League of Arab States.

We reject any foreign military intervention in any form whatsoever. Tunisia succeeded in its revolution without allowing anyone to intervene in its internal affairs. On the basis of that principle, Tunisia rejects any violation of Syria's sovereignty or territorial integrity. Our goal, as reflected in the decisions of the Arab League, is to work with all the necessary haste to defend and protect the Syrian people and staunch the bloodshed.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the call made by Tunisia at the League of Arab States Council of Ministers meeting held yesterday in Cairo for the holding of a conference of the friends of Syria, to take place in Tunis on 24 February. We call on all States to participate in the conference. The situation in Syria is grave. There is a dire need to find a solution and an exit from the plight of the Syrian people, so as to prevent a major humanitarian disaster.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (European Union): I have the honor to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.

We thank you, Mr. President, for your timely response to the crisis and for convening today's meeting. We also thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for her very clear and enlightening, albeit gruelling, report. The European Union is appalled by the steadily deteriorating situation in Syria.

Only a few weeks ago, the Syrian Government agreed to the cessation of the violence, the release of all political prisoners, the withdrawal of its armed forces and unhindered freedom of movement for observers and journalists. None of those commitments has been met. Instead, the regime continues its ruthless and outrageous campaign of repression against the Syrian people and its massive, gross and systematic violations of human rights. More than 6,000 Syrians are reported to have fallen victim to repression since the beginning of the crisis, and the situation is most probably worse. In addition, scores of peaceful protesters have been arbitrarily detained, tortured, raped and ill-treated.

As the High Commissioner has said herself, it has become almost impossible for her Office to update the death toll in Syria. She has also stated that all evidence points to the fact that the involvement of the Syrian army and security forces may constitute crimes against humanity punishable under international law. The independent international commission of inquiry said the same thing. The Secretary-General has called tirelessly for actions to stop those crimes. Three times the Human Rights Council has noted the overwhelming responsibility of the Syrian regime, as has the General Assembly at its current session. It is a key principle of the rule of law that perpetrators of crimes should be held accountable for their deeds.

The European Union has repeatedly called for an immediate end to the violence and for a peaceful and democratic transition. We welcomed the League of Arab States resolution of 22 January, which calls for a Syrian-led process aimed at bringing about an orderly political transition and, ultimately, a democratic, pluralistic political system.

The Security Council's recent inability to act in support of that resolution, owing to the exercise of the veto by two members, is deeply regrettable. It is even more regrettable that it has served the Syrian regime as a pretext for further dangerous backsliding and increased innocent civilian casualties. During the past few days, and especially since last Saturday, the Syrian Government has ferociously escalated its brutal campaign throughout the country with artillery, heavy weaponry and indiscriminate violence, leading to hundreds of casualties, including women and children.

The European Union has also expressed strong concerns about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Syrian people in a great number of localities affected by the unrest. It has stressed that the Syrian authorities must urgently alleviate the suffering of the

population living in those areas, protect the wounded and sick, guarantee unhindered access to medical care, without any discrimination or reprisal, and refrain from intimidating those providing medical assistance.

Instead of preventing innocent and injured civilians from seeking medical help, the Syrian Government must immediately allow the full and unimpeded access of relief personnel from international humanitarian organizations for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to persons in need of assistance. The press must also be allowed to carry out its vital role of providing independent information on the events in Syria without fear of violence or repression.

The European Union hopes that, at its next session starting on 27 February, the Human Rights Council will be prepared to take appropriate action on Syria. It also looks forward to the next update report of the commission of inquiry with regard to all alleged violations of international human rights law, which will feed into the discussions of the Human Rights Council.

Given the Syrian regime's continued use of violence against civilians, the European Union is currently discussing a new round of sanctions to be approved by the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in the coming days. As long as the repression persists, the European Union will continue its policy of imposing additional measures aimed exclusively at the regime, not the civilian population. The international community must join its efforts to target those responsible for or associated with the violent repression and those who support or benefit from the regime.

The violence must stop now. We reiterate our strong support for the Syrian people and encourage the Syrian opposition to make every effort to strengthen coordination on the way forward in order to achieve a peaceful transition to a Syria that is democratic, stable and inclusive — a Syria in which all human rights, including minority rights, are guaranteed and in which all Syrians are equal, regardless of their affiliations, ethnicity or beliefs. The European Union will continue to engage with representative members of the Syrian opposition who adhere to non-violence, inclusiveness and democratic values.

The European Union has backed the bold and comprehensive initiative of the League of Arab States and will continue to support the League's ongoing efforts. The Union welcomes the call for the establishment of a group of friends of Syria. We call once more on all members of the Security Council to assume their responsibilities. The time has come to speak with one voice and demand an end to the bloodshed and a democratic future for Syria. We stand by the Syrian people, and we once again call on the Syrian regime to immediately end the killing of civilians, withdraw the Syrian army from besieged towns and cities, and cooperate fully with the Arab League, including with its initiative of 22 January, in order to usher in a peaceful political transition in which the Syrian people itself can decide its own future.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We regret that today's meeting of the General Assembly has been convened with many procedural violations. Failure to follow procedure can seriously disrupt the work of the Organization.

It is essential that we not weaken diplomatic efforts to find a swift political solution to the Syrian crisis. That is precisely Russia's policy. After his trip to Damascus on 7 February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Lavrov, outlined a perfectly realistic strategy for resolving the situation.

First, the League of Arab States observer mission should continue its work and be strengthened in number so to as to be able to observe all areas of activity and investigate any violation, by any party, of the ceasefire principles. The Secretary-General has spoken in support of a similar idea to deploy a joint monitoring mission of the League of Arab States and the United Nations.

Secondly, efforts to end the violence must include engaging in political dialogue among all Syrian factions — the Government and the opposition groups alike. Damascus has confirmed that Farouk Al-Sharaa, the Vice-President of Syria, has complete authority to enter into such a dialogue. If the dialogue is to begin, anyone with influence on opposition groups that have not entered into dialogue should bring pressure to bear on them to do so. Moscow has made a proposal along those lines for representatives of the Government and opposition groups to meet without precondition to discuss the entire Syrian agenda.

Thirdly, the Syrian Arab Republic should adopt a new constitution, on the basis of which preparations should be undertaken for multiparty general elections. One new element is the League of Arab States decision of 12 February. We are studying it, even as we regret

that the observer mission had to cut short its work, which we have taken into consideration.

The League of Arab States initiative to deploy a peacekeeping mission to Syria jointly with the United Nations requires careful consideration. It would require the consent of the receiving country. Moreover, if there is to be a peacekeeping mission, there would have to be a peace to keep. In other words, some kind of ceasefire must first be agreed. Unfortunately, the armed groups opposing the regime are not answerable to, or controlled by, anyone.

In the coming days, during our contacts with those who have proposed the initiative, we hope to clarify the legal and practical possibilities in that regard. The Russian delegation is ready for that task.

Mr. Bonne (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having taken the initiative to convene this important meeting. I also thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights for having updated the General Assembly on the situation in Syria.

I associate myself with the statement just made by the representative of the European Union.

We are dismayed at what we have heard today. Since the initial report of the commission of inquiry of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1) last November, the situation in Syria has only worsened. The Damascus authorities are deaf to the repeated calls of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. They are also deaf to the appeals of the League of Arab States. The Syrian authorities are locked into a strategy of terror. They continue to make extensive use of murder, torture, arbitrary detention, disappearances and all forms of violence against civilians who are peacefully expressing their aspiration to freedom.

At least 6,000 Syrians, including hundreds of women and children, have fallen under the blows of Bashar Al-Assad's regime for almost a year. Every day, there are dozens of new civilian victims in ominously unclear numbers. The rate is now so high that since the beginning of this year, the High Commissioner has no longer been able to give an exact figure.

Worse, the veto exercised by two members of the Security Council reassured the Syrian regime in its murderous strategy. That regime now believes that it has carte blanche to slaughter its people. It no longer thinks twice about using heavy artillery to silence any kind of opposition. The protesting cities, in particular Homs, are under siege and deprived of everything. The hospitals themselves have become torture and detention centres, depriving the wounded of any chance of survival.

The humanitarian situation worsens every day, while the authorities still refuse access to people who are suffering. The commission of inquiry told us in December, and the High Commissioner affirmed today, that the Syrian regime is guilty of crimes against humanity. Impunity must end. The Syrian authorities, first and foremost President Al-Assad, must answer for their actions before the courts. Our commitment to the fight against impunity is well known. We would like to reaffirm it today in view of the crimes taking place in Syria.

The double veto in the Security Council will not prevent the international community from continuing to act to defend the Syrian people. That veto will not stop us. France and its partners will continue to work in all areas to put a halt to the violence. We should continue to support the initiative of the League of Arab States. For several months, the League has spared no effort to put an end to the violence, to find a peaceful solution to the crisis and to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The plan of action that it adopted on 2 November and finalized on 22 January (S/2012/71, annex, enclosure 1) prepares the ground for a democratic transition in Syria that includes the transfer of President Bashar Al-Assad's authority and the launching of a national dialogue in an environment free from violence. That is the only credible peace initiative. The involvement of regional actors is the measure of its viability.

We welcome yesterday's decision by the League of Arab States to appoint a special envoy responsible for implementing the Arab plan. We hope that the Secretary-General will strengthen his links with the League of Arab States, in particular through that envoy. The Assembly will also be seized by the call of the League. It will therefore be important to demonstrate our full support for the measures that it proposes.

The efforts of the international community must unite to support the Arab initiative. That is why we fully support the establishment of a group of friends of the Syrian people in order to bring together all States that condemn the atrocities of Bashar Al-Assad's regime and support a peaceful transition in Syria. Such

a group would make it possible to heighten international action by coordinating pressure on the Syrian regime. It would also show the Syrian people that the international community is not abandoning it.

We also commend the protests of Syrians who, unarmed, are fighting peacefully to defend their rights, freedom and dignity. We admire their courage and call on them to support the Syrian National Council. We therefore welcome the plan to establish a democratic and pluralistic Syria based on respect for human rights and ensuring the rights of minorities and their members.

Finally, the situation in Syria will be the focus of the nineteenth session of the Human Rights Council in a few weeks. The commission of inquiry will then present its final report and its recommendations, which will be considered with the greatest attention. We call on the Human Rights Council to use that upcoming opportunity to condemn unanimously and most resolutely the atrocities of Bashar Al-Assad's regime.

Mr. Nishida (Japan): At the outset, I would like to commend your great initiative, Mr. President, to convene this plenary meeting of the General Assembly in a timely manner to address the inhumane situation in Syria. I would also like to thank High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay for her informative briefing on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

Japan shares the grave concerns of the international community over the increasing use of force, including heavy weapons, by the Syrian authorities against the expression of the Syrian people's aspirations for reforms. That is causing many deaths and injuries, including of women and children. Japan expresses its condolences to all the victims of the various atrocities in Syria.

Japan fully supports the continued efforts and strong commitment by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve the situation in Syria. Japan has been a sponsor of the Human Rights Council resolutions on Syria and welcomes the report of the commission of inquiry (A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1). Japan shares the profound concern about the commission's findings that gross and systematic violations of human rights have been committed by the Syrian authorities, including those that may amount to crimes against humanity.

Japan is particularly concerned about reports that the number of child victims has been increasing and that children have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and sexually abused while in detention. Our special concerns also go to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country, including the shortage of medical and food supplies that are fundamental to the lives of the Syrian people.

Japan fully supports the efforts and strong commitment of the Secretary-General. Japan also welcomes the initiatives of the League of Arab States to bring about stability and democracy in Syria. Japan supports the measures taken by the League of Arab States and other relevant countries against the Syrian authorities, and has joined those collective efforts by adopting appropriate measures.

In order to prevent further bloodshed, Japan joins the calls of the international community for the Syrian authorities to halt the violence immediately and implement the Arab League peace plan promptly and fully. Japan believes that is the only credible road to a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis.

An urgent and unified response by the international community is needed now to improve the situation in Syria. However, another Security Council draft resolution on the Syrian situation has been rejected. We are deeply disappointed at this failure of action. The Security Council, which consists of responsible members of the international community, should have issued a strong, unified message to bring this inhumane and intolerable situation to an immediate end.

I thank you again, Mr. President, for giving all Member States this timely opportunity today to stand up and speak out about this important issue of international concern. We very much hope that the General Assembly will send a strong and united message to the world, and the Syrian people in particular, and contribute to the solution of the crisis in Syria.

Japan will continue to make every diplomatic effort possible, in close coordination with the international community, for the immediate end of this violence and a peaceful and durable solution to the crisis.

Mrs. DiCarlo (United States of America): I thank United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Pillay both for her briefing and for all the work she and her Office are doing to highlight the plight of the Syrian people during this most difficult time.

The information that High Commissioner Pillay has just provided us is deeply disturbing. It confirms yet again that the Al-Assad regime is in blatant defiance

of its commitments to the action plan it agreed to with the League of Arab States and of its obligations under international law. The commitments agreed with the League of Arab States included immediately ending all acts of violence, releasing those who had been detained arbitrarily, withdrawing the army from cities and towns, guaranteeing the freedom of peaceful demonstrations, and allowing full and unhindered access for Arab institutions and Arab and international media. And yet, as we have seen, the Al-Assad regime has chosen to do just the opposite, turning its heavy weaponry on its own citizens and shelling its own cities and towns.

At present, we cannot know all the exact details of what has occurred. The Al-Assad regime has chosen to keep observers away, whether they are from the Arab League, international human rights monitors or the international press. But in broad strokes, the reality is completely clear, and it is appalling. We know enough. We know that more than 6,000 Syrians have been killed. We know that scores of children have died. We know that Syrians are being tortured by their own Government, and we know also that when investigations are undertaken and final responsibility is determined, we too will be judged as Members of the United Nations. This is the context of our discussions today.

The United States again calls on the Syrian Government to respect the human rights and dignity of its people. We call on all parties to cease all violence immediately. We also recognize that when citizens protest peacefully and respectfully for months on end, and these protests are met by gunfire and mortar fire directed at them by their own Government, at a terrible cost in the lives of civilian men, women and children, then armed opposition cannot come as a surprise. We hold the Syrian regime fully responsible for the worsening cycle of violence.

The United States applauds the initiatives and leadership of the Arab League and, in particular, welcomes the announcement of a friends of Syria conference to be held on 24 February in Tunisia. We commend the Arab League for putting forth a plan calling for the regime to halt operations against defenceless civilians, facilitate a transition and broker a political solution to this ongoing crisis. We strongly agree with the Arab League's demand yesterday to immediately and fully stop all acts of violence and the murder of civilians, and its renewed call on the Syrian armed forces to immediately lift the military siege imposed on residential districts and villages.

We believe that the international community must work together to speak with one voice in supporting these efforts. In that regard, we commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his sustained commitment to resolving the Syrian crisis.

The United States has been working intensively with the international community, including in this body, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, to address the situation in Syria. We again call on the Syrian Government to permit unfettered access to the commission of inquiry established by the Human Rights Council in August. We also call on Syrian authorities to allow full and unimpeded access for humanitarian relief personnel in order to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations, including the more than 70,000 internally displaced persons residing in Syria.

The United States fully supports the Syrian people's demands for a unified Syria with a democratic, representative and inclusive Government that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms and provides equal protection under the law for all individuals, regardless of sect, ethnicity, religion or gender. As President Obama said on 4 February, "Every Government has the responsibility to protect its citizens, and any Government that brutalizes and massacres its people does not deserve to govern".

Mr. Seger (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I welcome your initiative in convening this meeting, and I appreciate the frank and open briefing of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Since the Human Rights Council's eighteenth special session, held in December 2011, on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, the spiral of violence in the country has accelerated at a disturbing pace. Most of the victims of that spiral are civilians, more and more of whom are killed each day. The loss of life is as deplorable as it is unacceptable.

I would like to make four points. First, Switzerland strongly condemns the human rights violations occurring in Syria. Switzerland calls on the Syrian authorities immediately to end the violence and repression against the civilian population. Access to victims, in particular by medical personnel, must be guaranteed in all circumstances. Switzerland therefore calls on the Syrian authorities to allow all humanitarian actors to carry out their work without interference.

Secondly, it is imperative that this unacceptable situation remain on the agenda of all the relevant organs of the United Nations. It is the duty of the international community to react when confronted with such serious human rights violations. The United Nations system can function effectively only if the various bodies act according to the responsibilities entrusted to them and cooperate in a satisfactory manner. Switzerland regrets that such crucial complementarity is lacking in the present situation.

Given the gravity of the human rights violations and the unwillingness of the Syrian authorities to prosecute their perpetrators, Switzerland believes that the Council must at the earliest refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Thirdly, Switzerland commends the actions of the Human Rights Council in connection with the situation. We call on the Government of Syria to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council, particularly with the independent commission it established and the future Special Rapporteur. Switzerland thanks the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and its bodies for their commitment in that respect and calls on the Syrian authorities to cooperate with them.

Lastly, Switzerland commends the efforts of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and of the League of Arab States to put an end to the violent repression taking place in Syria. Resolving the ongoing crisis in Syria will require a sincere and inclusive dialogue aimed at ensuring respect for and guaranteeing the human rights of the Syrian people. Switzerland will fully support the efforts made in that respect.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China has carefully studied the report (A/HRC/S-18/2) of the eighteenth special session of the Human Rights Council and listened attentively to the briefing by Mrs. Pillay. China has consistently maintained that constructive dialogue and cooperation is the only way to promote and protect human rights.

Syria is an important country in the Middle East. Peace and stability in Syria serves the common interests of the Syrian people and of the international community as a whole. Like other Member States, China has followed closely the developments in Syria. We call on all parties in Syria to stop the violence, avoid casualties involving innocent civilians in particular, restore order in the country as soon as possible, and respect the aspirations of the Syrian people for change and the protection of their own interests.

We support the good-offices efforts made by the Arab League and Arab countries to resolve the Syrian issue peacefully and properly, so as to promote the early launch of an inclusive political process led by the Syrian people and with extensive participation by all parties, resolve differences and disputes through dialogue and negotiations, and restore stability in Syria. That is in the common interests of Syria, Arab countries and the international community as a whole.

To achieve those goals, the international community should play a positive and constructive role. The actions of the Security Council on the Syrian issue should be in keeping with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms governing international relations; help ease tensions and promote political dialogue; defuse disputes; and help to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East region, rather than complicate the issue.

On the Syrian issue, China does not shelter anyone or intentionally oppose anyone. China takes an objective, just and responsible approach. China remains committed to upholding the fundamental long-term interests of the Syrian people, maintaining peace and stability in Syria and the region, and safeguarding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms governing international relations.

Our goal is to shield the Syrian people from conflict and warfare. China has always maintained that, in international relations, countries should refrain from resort to use or threat of force, nor should they push through regime change. China believes that sanctions and pressure are not conducive to the proper settlement of problems. That is China's consistent position of principle and its long-standing foreign policy. It serves the overall interests of the international community, particularly the immediate and long-term interests of small and medium-sized countries and developing countries.

China has done a great deal of work to ease the situation in Syria. China will continue to work with other Member States and play a positive role in the peaceful and proper settlement of the Syrian issue, while fully respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.